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LETTER DATED 12 APRIL 1996 FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to refer to paragraph 15 of Security Council resolution 1049 (1996) of 5 March 1996 in which the Council requested me to keep it informed on the situation in Burundi. I regret that I have to convey to you and the members of the Council alarming information received from my Special Representative in that country.

The security situation in Burundi took another turn for the worse during the month of March. The relative quiet of February gave way to a sharp increase in the number of attacks by Hutu rebels belonging to the armed wing of the National Council for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD), to the National Liberation Front (FROLINA) and to the Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People (PALIPEHUTU). Heavy fighting, which used to be concentrated in the northern part of the country, has now spread to areas in the south previously untouched by the conflicts. It is estimated that there may now be a few thousand rebels in that part of the country and they are reported to be establishing casual or light fortifications and using more sophisticated equipment than hitherto, including mines. The interruption of fishing in Lake Tanganyika, which is causing supply problems in the capital, is a good demonstration of the determination of the armed forces to stop the movement and infiltration of rebels to and from Zaire.

On the political front, some serious differences have appeared between the President and the prime Minister, particularly on the issue of negotiations with the armed opposition. The President has publicly favoured negotiations on condition that the rebels give up violence, while the Prime Minister has expressed opposition to any negotiation with groups such as CNDD and has invited the Tutsi community to arm itself. There are reports that some armament was distributed recently to civilians in Bujumbura and elsewhere.

The European Union and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which visited Bujumbura last week, have stressed to the leadership in Burundi that economic assistance would not be forthcoming as long as the political and security situations remained unstable. In response, the Prime Minister disclaimed Burundi's need for foreign aid.

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The situation has deteriorated to the point that senior parliamentarians have expressed deep concern that the armed forces might engage in reprisals against the Hutu population still living in Bujumbura and its suburbs. The Prime Minister's call to arm the population as well as his claim that Burundi did not need foreign aid have been severely criticized. There are also some reports that the National Assembly would suspend its session shortly since it could not obtain the programme of action which it had been requesting for several months from the Government.

The international community has been alerted, notably by the latest report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights who, upon returning from Burundi, spoke of a creeping genocide ("génocide au compte-gouttes"). As the Security Council knows, the Special Rapporteur has called for sanctions against those responsible for the violence, while my Special Representative in Burundi has continued to appeal to all concerned for an immediate end to the violence and for a constructive dialogue among the main protagonists.

Former President Nyerere's ongoing effort with regard to Burundi is taking place in a very tense environment. While we will soon know whether the envisaged dialogue has any chance of being started, I fear that there is a real danger of the situation in Burundi degenerating to the point where it might erupt into a genocidal conflict. Meanwhile, the Secretariat continues to consult Member States in accordance with paragraph 13 of resolution 1049 (1996). I hope shortly to report the results to the Council.

(Signed) Boutros BOUTROS-GHALI